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NDJAMENA 00000460 001.2 OF 002

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SUMMARY

11. (U) This is the first of three cables on Chad's approach to environmental affairs, conveying information gathered in the course of the recent visit of the Regional Environmental, Science, Technology, and Health Officer (REO) to N'Djamena, and also following a number of high-level interventions by Chadian officials eager to put their nation on our radar for advice and assistance in areas such as climate change. The Republic of Chad finds itself on the front lines of climate change and desertification. At the December 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit, the country will support the broader Central African position favoring the "REDD Plus" approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. In long-term efforts to combat climate change and desertification, the Chadian Government intends to plant belts of trees around all of the country's major cities, as well as encourage the use of more fuel-efficient cooking stoves. The government hosted a climate change conference for AU parliamentarians October 15-17, which began to flesh out the possibility of building a "Great Green Wall," i.e., a band of trees stretching across all of the Sahel countries from Senegal to Djibouti in a bid to slow the Sahara's southern advance.
END SUMMARY.

Chad's Views and Engagement on Climate Change

12. (SBU) In a meeting with Charge d'affairs on relations with Sudan October 7, FM Moussa Faki Mahamat raised the subject of climate change, expressing serious concern for environmental degradation in Chad, and requested closer coordination with the U.S. in efforts to address climate change, shrinkage of Lake Chad (reported septel), desertification, deforestation, and reductions in bio-diversity and endangered species populations (reported septel). Faki said that the most interesting aspect of his recent visit to the U.S. for the UNGA was the conversations he had with members of the U.S. Congress on the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. He said that the Foreign Ministry would work closely with experts at the Ministry of Environment and Aquatic Resources to prepare for the December

meeting in Copenhagen of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Chadian delegation hoped to meet with U.S. officials at the event to forge new relations on environmental topics of critical importance to Chad's future.

¶3. (SBU) On October 6, Chad's Environment and Aquatic Resources Minister, Professor Ali Souleyman Dabye, paid a visit to the Embassy to brief on Chad's plans to host a climate change conference for AU parliamentarians October 15-17. The conference, part of which we attended, looked at potential regional efforts to combat climate change, including the notion of a Great Green Wall to slow the southern drift of the Sahel. The Great Green Wall would consist of planted trees stretching across all of the countries of the Sahel (the geographic band of semi-arid land just south of the Sahara) from Senegal to Djibouti. Salvano Briceno, Director of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction lent UN support to the concept of a Great Green Wall in his October 17 speech to the gathered parliamentarians. In addition, he challenged every nation to change citizens' mentality toward the environment and applauded parliamentarians' plans to develop a common African position linking climate change adaption to risk reduction.

¶4. (U) In separate meetings on October 6-7 with visiting West and Central Africa Regional Environmental Officer (REO), the ministry's Secretary General, Sandjima Dounia, and Forestry Department Director Abakar Zougoulou presented Chad's views on the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) climate change mechanism. They both stated that Chad supported the "REDD Plus" approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. They made clear that Chad would argue strongly for that approach at the December 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit. The REDD Plus position has been repeatedly endorsed by the Central African States, who are seeking financing not only for conservation efforts, but also for improved forest management and reforestation programs (Ref A).

NDJAMENA 00000460 002.2 OF 002

Fighting Desertification by Planting Trees

¶5. (U) Chadian Government officials told REO that there had been little scientific study of the process of desertification in Chad. However, the general consensus among experts and ministry officials, including Ministry Secretary General Sandjima Dounia, is that the Sahara desert is marching southward in Chad at the rate of 5-6 kilometers per year. Officials also noted that desertification was creating higher average surface temperatures at Lake Chad, on which at least one million Chadians depended for water, irrigation and fishing. Higher temperatures were accelerating the process of evaporation, which was one of many factors contributing to the shrinking of the lake (the causes of Lake Chad's shrinkage and what might be done about it will be reported septel).

¶6. (U) Beyond hosting the October 15-17 conference on climate change and the Great Green Wall, the Chadian Government is implementing its own greening initiative, under which a belt of trees will eventually be planted around all of Chad's cities. The project began in earnest on Earth Day in April 2009 when President Deby opened a tree nursery in Gaoui 10 kilometers north of Ndjamena], one of two pilot project tree nurseries that are now in operation (the second nursery is in Abeche). REO and embassy officers visited the nursery on October 9, where more than one million saplings are now being grown for eventual transplantation to form Ndjamena's green belt. By 2011, the government plans to have planted 10 million trees around Ndjamena, Abeche and other cities.

¶7. (SBU) In a meeting on October 7, REO and embassy officers asked the Forestry Director why many of Ndjamena's large, old growth trees had been cut down in recent months, leaving barren central spaces in the capital and along many previously leafy streets. Massive tree cutting in the capital seems inconsistent with the government's greening initiatives, and informed insiders say that the tree cutting was motivated by security concerns, after rebels extensively used tree cover in their attack on the capital in early 2008. The

Forestry Director went to great lengths to explain that many old trees were removed because they posed a danger of falling down and interfering with traffic and with electrical and other utility lines. In addition, he claimed that they were not the right species for an urban setting, and the ministry had already begun replanting with trees that were more appropriate for cities.

Encouraging More Efficient Cooking Methods

¶18. (U) Officials from the Chadian Agency for Domestic and Environmental Agency also briefed REO on climate change mitigation projects which their agency is implementing. Since 2002, the agency has distributed over 40,000 fuel-efficient wood-burning cooking stoves. Through 2010, the agency plans to distribute another 50,000 stoves, and will also continue long-term training programs under which villagers are trained to manufacture stoves for their own use and for sale in urban centers. The agency is also planning to conduct a pilot project to transform agricultural waste (e.g., corn and wheat harvest waste) into readymade bricks that can be burned as a cooking fuel. Wood is the predominant source of cooking fuel in Chad, and following the government's July 2008 ban on the cutting of live trees and its subsequent December 2008 ban on use of charcoal for cooking, the agency's work is helping to reduce the amount of wood that Chadians consume for cooking and to decrease the pressure on Chad's remaining timber resources.

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) GoC officials have returned from the UNGA eager to improve international cooperation on environmental affairs, especially climate change. As Chad continues to stabilize and emerge from civil strife and regional conflict over the course of the next few years, the USG and other international partners and donors could have additional real opportunities to engage more fully with Chadian officials and civil society on the country's many interlinked environmental challenges, including climate change and desertification. Fuller engagement is dependent on available resources from both sides. END COMMENT.

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